

## CHAPTER 39

### *Al-Zumar: The Companies*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 8 *sections*; 75 *verses*)

The name of this chapter, *The Companies*, refers to the two classes, the believers and the disbelievers. Its revelation belongs to the middle Makkan period.

Sincere obedience to Allâh is required in the first section. Those who obey are the believers, and those who refuse to obey are the disbelievers, and the two are spoken of in the next section. The third shows that the Qur'ân is a perfect guidance, and the fourth that its rejecters will be punished. The fifth emphasizes the punishment of rejecter, by stating that evil will not be averted from those who persist in rejection, and the sixth calls attention to Divine mercy, which is so vast that the greatest sinners have no reason to despair. The last two sections speak of the coming of the judgment, when each of the two parties is made to taste that which it deserves.

#### SECTION 1: Obedience to Allâh

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

**1** The revelation of the Book is from Allâh, the Mighty, the Wise.

**2** Surely We have revealed to thee the Book with truth, so serve Allâh, being sincere to Him in obedience.

**3** Now surely sincere obedience is due to Allâh (alone). And those who choose protectors besides Him (say): We serve them only that they may bring us nearer to Allâh.<sup>a</sup> Surely Allâh will judge between them in that in which they differ. Surely Allâh guides not him who is a liar, ungrateful.

**3a.** All worshippers of false deities pretend that such deities are worshipped only to get nearer to Allâh, as if Allâh Himself were unapproachable. The idol-worshippers say that the idols are only symbols for concentration on Allâh, while the Christians, plainly spoken of in the next verse, hold that without the Son they can have no access

to God. But undue reverence of created things is a step leading to degradation of human nature. Hence it is that Islâm requires sincere obedience to, or worship of, Allâh alone.

**4** If Allâh desired to take a son to Himself, He could have chosen those He pleased out of those whom He has created<sup>a</sup> — Glory be to Him! He is Allâh, the One, the Subduer (of all).

**5** He has created the heavens and the earth with truth; He makes the night cover the day and makes the day overtake the night, and He has made the sun and the moon subservient; each one moves on to an assigned term. Now surely He is the Mighty, the Forgiver.

**6** He created you from a single being, then made its mate of the same (kind). And He sent down for you eight of the cattle in pairs.<sup>a</sup> He creates you in the wombs of your mothers — creation after creation — in triple darkness. That is Allâh, your *Rabb*; His is the kingdom. There is no Deity but He. How are you then turned away?

**4a.** We find the Christian doctrine referred to and refuted in very early Makkan revelations, such as the 19th chapter, which was recited by the Muslim refugees in Abyssinia before the Negus, in or about the fifth year of the Prophet's mission. The Qur'ân refers to the error of attributing a son to the Divine Being almost as frequently as to the setting up of idols. It is pointed out here that no one holds a relation of sonship to Allâh, but that it is His chosen servants that are metaphorically called His sons, because in being manifestations of the Divine attributes they stand to Allâh in the same relation as a son stands to a father, being images of His attributes as a son is the image of a father.

**6a.** The word *anzala* (infinitive noun *inzâl*) is not applied only to the actual *sending down* of a thing, but also to *making it accessible to human beings*. *Inzâl* means *îsâl* or *iblâgh* (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî), just as iron (57:25) and clothing (7:26) are spoken of as having been sent down. It is in this sense that the cattle are spoken of here as being *sent down* for human beings. The eight of the cattle are the four pairs spoken of in 6:143-144. The four animals are mentioned particularly as being most useful for human beings.

**7** If you are ungrateful, then surely Allâh is above need of you. And He likes not ungratefulness in His servants. And if you are grateful, He likes it for you. And no bearer of a burden will bear another's burden. Then to your *Rabb* is your return, then will He inform you of what you did. Surely He is Knower of what is in the breasts.

**8** And when distress afflicts a human being he or she calls upon his or her *Rabb*, turning to Him; then when He grants him or her a favour from Him, he or she forgets that for which he or she called upon Him before, and sets up rivals to Allah that he or she may cause (humans) to stray from His path. Say: Enjoy thine ungratefulness for a little, surely you are of the companions of the Fire.

**9** Is he or she who is obedient during hours of the night, prostrating himself or herself and standing, taking care of the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his or her *Rabb*—? Say: Are those who know and those who know not alike? Only humans of understanding mind.

## SECTION 2: **Believers and Disbelievers**

**10** Say: O My servants who believe, keep your duty to your *Rabb*. For those who do good in this world is good, and Allâh's earth is spacious.<sup>a</sup> Truly the steadfast will be paid their reward without measure.

**11** Say: I am commanded to serve Allâh, being sincere to Him in obedience,

**10a.** The words are a comfort to the Muslims, who were subjected to sufferings in their own land, and give them the assurance that, if suppressed in one land, Islâm will prosper in other lands.

**12** And I am commanded to be the first of those who submit.

**13** Say: I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the chastisement of a grievous day.

**14** Say: Allâh I serve, being sincere to Him in my obedience.

**15** Serve then what you will besides Him. Say: The losers surely are those who lose themselves and their people on the day of Resurrection. Now surely that is the manifest loss!

**16** They shall have coverings of fire above them and coverings beneath them. With that Allâh makes His servants to fear; so keep your duty to Me, O My servants.

**17** And those who eschew the worship of the idols and turn to Allâh, for them is good news. So give good news to My servants,

**18** Who listen to the Word, then follow the best of it. Such are they whom Allâh has guided, and such are the humans of understanding.

**19** He against whom the sentence of chastisement is due — can you save him who is in the Fire?

**20** But those who keep their duty to their *Rabb*, for them are high places, above them higher places,<sup>a</sup> built (for them), wherein rivers flow. (It is) the promise of Allâh. Allâh fails not in (His) promise.

**21** See you not that Allâh sends down water from the clouds, then makes it go down into the earth in springs, then brings forth therewith herbage of various hues; then it withers so that you see it turn yellow, then He makes it chaff?<sup>a</sup> Surely there is a reminder in this for human beings of understanding.

**20a.** This shows that in the Hereafter, and in this life as well, there is an unceasing progress, for the high places to which the righteous attain have places still higher above them.

### SECTION 3: A Perfect Guidance

**22** Is he whose breast Allâh has opened to Islâm so that he follows a light from his *Rabb*—? So woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allâh! Such are in clear error.

**23** Allâh has revealed the best announcement, a Book consistent, repeating (its injunctions),<sup>a</sup> whereat do shudder the skins of those who fear their *Rabb*, then their skins and their hearts soften to Allâh's remembrance. This is Allâh's guidance — He guides with it whom He pleases. And he whom Allâh leaves in error, there is no guide for him.

**21a.** The allusion is to the fate of nations; they are brought into existence, made to rise, then decay and are swept out of existence. Even the Muslim nations are subject to the same law, but Islâm itself, being a law of life, is not subject to decay. The place of one nation that decays is taken by another. Moreover, nations that decay because of their transgressions may again be raised to life by turning to righteousness.

**23a.** The Qur'ân is here spoken of as being *mutashâbih* and *mathânî*. The first word means *that which is conformable in its various parts* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). This claim is by no means insignificant. The Qur'ân was revealed by portions during a period of twenty-three years, and during this period the circumstances under which the Holy Prophet lived were of such a varied nature that the history of no other man offers a similar combination of varying circumstances. Yet, through all these vicissitudes, the Qur'ân shows a strict uniformity. The conformability of its various parts, however, signifies more than a mere uniformity; it signifies that some parts explain other parts. *Mutashâbih*, it should be noted, signifies, according to the best authorities, that *some parts of it verify other parts*. Again, it is called *mathânî*, plural of *mathnâ*, which means *repeated* or *repeating*. It is given this name because it repeats over and over again the most important subjects, especially the Unity of the Divine Being and the accountability of human actions. See also 3:7a.

**24** Is then he who has to guard himself with his own person against the evil chastisement of the Resurrection day—? And it will be said to the iniquitous: Taste what you earned.

**25** Those before them denied, so the chastisement came to them from whence they perceived not.

**26** So Allâh made them taste disgrace in this world's life, and certainly the chastisement of the Hereafter is greater. Did they but know!

**27** And certainly We have set forth for human beings in this Qur'ân similitudes of every sort that they may mind.<sup>a</sup>

**28** An Arabic Qur'ân without any crookedness, that they may guard against evil.

**29** Allâh sets forth a parable: A man belonging to partners differing with one another, and a man (devoted) wholly to one man. Are the two alike in condition? Praise be to Allâh! Nay, most of them know not.

**30** Surely you will die and they (too) will die;

**31** Then surely on the day of Resurrection you will contend one with another before your *Rabb*.

**27a.** The Arabic Glorious Qur'ân repeatedly claims to be a complete collection of the best teachings for the moral and devotional welfare of human beings. Here it claims to

be a perfect book, as not only containing all the necessary teachings, but also answering all the objections of its opponents; see 17:89a and 25:33a.

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### SECTION 4: Rejectors will be Abased

**32** Who is then more unjust than he who utters a lie against Allâh and denies the truth, when it comes to him? Is there not in hell an abode for the disbelievers?

**33** And he who brings the truth and accepts the truth — such are the dutiful.

**34** They shall have with their *Rabb* what they please. Such is the reward of the doers of good —

**35** That Allâh may ward off from them the worst of what they did, and give them their reward for the best of what they did.<sup>a</sup>

**36** Is not Allâh sufficient for His servant? And they seek to frighten you with those besides Him.<sup>a</sup> And whomsoever Allâh leaves in error, there is no guide for him.

**37** And whom Allâh guides, there is none that can lead him astray. Is not Allâh Mighty, the Lord of retribution?

**38** And if you ask them, Who created the *samâwât* and the earth? They will say: Allâh. Say: See you then that those you call upon besides Allâh, would they, if Allâh desire to afflict me with harm, remove His harm? Or if He desire to show me mercy, could they withhold His mercy? Say: Allâh is sufficient for me. On Him do the reliant rely.

**35a.** The Arabic Glorious Qur'ân brought about an unprecedented revolution in the world. People who took pride in doing evil deeds now aspired to deeds of righteousness. They were thus turned away from the worst deeds to the best. This verse prophetically refers to this great change.

**36a.** The superstitious Arabs no doubt believed that their idols could do harm to men who did not admit their authority.

**39** Say: O people, work in your place. Surely I am a worker, so you will come to know,

**40** Who it is to whom there comes a chastisement abasing him, and on whom falls a lasting chastisement.<sup>a</sup>

**41** Surely We have revealed to you the Book with truth for (the good of) human beings. So whoever follows the right way, it is for his or her own *nafs*, and whoever errs, he or she errs only to its detriment. And you are not a custodian over them.

## SECTION 5: **Punishment cannot be Averted**

**42** Allâh takes (human being's) *nafs* at the time of their death, and those that die not, during their sleep. Then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death<sup>a</sup> and sends the others back till an appointed term. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.

**43** Or, take they intercessors besides Allâh? Say: What! Even though they control naught, nor do they understand.

**44** Say: Allâh's is the intercession altogether. His is the kingdom of the *samâwât* and the earth. Then to Him you will be returned.

**40a.** Two kinds of punishment are plainly spoken of, viz., the punishment that will bring disgrace, which is clearly the punishment of this life, and the lasting punishment that the wicked receive in the life after death. The first of these demonstrates the truth of the other.

**42a.** It is clear that it is not the animal *nafs* that is taken away in sleep; it is the *nafs* that stands for human consciousness. In death both are taken away. The statement further makes it clear that the word *tawaffâ* is applied to the taking of the *nafs* and not to the removal of the body from one place to another. See also 21:95a and 23:100a.

**45** And when Allâh alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter shrinks, and when those besides Him are mentioned, lo! They are joyful.<sup>a</sup>

**46** Say: O Allâh, Originator of the *samâwât* and the earth, Knower of the unseen and the seen, You judge between Your servants as to that wherein they differ.

**47** And had those who do wrong all that is in the earth and the like of it with it, they would certainly offer it as ransom from the evil of the chastisement on the day of Resurrection. And what they never thought of shall become plain to them from Allâh.<sup>a</sup>

**48** And the evil of what they wrought will become plain to them,<sup>a</sup> and that which they mocked at will beset them.

**49** So when harm afflicts a human he or she calls upon Us; then, when We give him or her a boon from Us, he or she says: I have been given it only by means of knowledge. Nay, it is a trial, but most of them know not.

**50** Those before them did say it indeed, but what they earned availed them not.

**45a.** Elsewhere the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân says: "And most of them believe not in Allâh without associating others (with Him)" (12:106).

**47a.** *What they never thought of* signifies the overthrow of their power in this life and the manifestation of the evil consequences of their deeds in the Hereafter.

**48a.** The fact that the heaven and hell of the next life are only manifestations of the religious realities of this life is stated here in clear language. The evil consequences of what they do are hidden from the eye in this life, but they shall *become plain* in the next life.

**51** So there befell them the evil which they had earned. And those who are unjust from among these, there shall befall them the evil which they earn, and they shall not escape.<sup>a</sup>

**52** Know they not that Allâh gives ample subsistence to whom He pleases, and He straitens; surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.

## SECTION 6: **Divine Mercy**

**53** Say: O My servants who have been prodigal regarding their *nafs*, despair not of the mercy of Allâh; surely Allâh forgives sins altogether. He is indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful.<sup>a</sup>

**54** And turn to your *Rabb* and submit to Him before chastisement comes to you, then you will not be helped.

**55** And follow the best<sup>a</sup> that has been revealed to you from your *Rabb* before chastisement comes to you all of a sudden, while you perceive not—

**56** Lest a *nafs* should say: O woe is me, that I fell short of my duty to Allâh! and surely I was of those who laughed to scorn;



**51a.** Wonderful indeed is the certainty of the tone in which these prophecies are worded, when all around there was not a single ray of hope for Islâm, and its enemies were in the ascendant.

**53a.** Stress is laid on the mercy and love of Allâh in all religions, but these great Divine attributes find their true and final expression in Islâm. No religion gives the solace and comfort which we find in this verse. It discloses the all-comprehensive mercy of Allâh, before which the sins of men become quite insignificant.

**55a.** *Aḥsan*, or *best*, stands for the revelation of the Qur'ân. Allâh has ever been revealing His will to human beings, but the Qur'ân, being the final expression of His will, is the best revelation that has been sent to human beings.

**57** Or it should say: Had Allâh guided me, I should have been dutiful.

**58** Or it should say, when it sees the chastisement: Had I another chance I should be a doer of good.

**59** Aye! My messages came to you, but you did reject them, and was proud and was of the disbelievers.

**60** And on the day of Resurrection you will see those who lied against Allâh, their faces will be blackened. Is there not in hell an abode for the proud?

**61** And Allâh delivers those who keep their duty with their achievement — evil touches them not, nor do they grieve.

**62** Allâh is the Creator of all things and He has charge over everything.

**63** His are the treasures of the *samâwât* and the earth. And those who disbelieve in the messages of Allâh, such are the losers.

## SECTION 7: The Final Judgment

**64** Say: Do you bid me serve others than Allâh, O ye ignorant ones?

**65** And certainly, it has been revealed to thee and to those before you: If you associate (with Allâh), your work would certainly come to naught and you wouldst be a loser.

**66** Nay, but serve Allâh alone and be of the thankful.

**67** And they honour not Allâh with the honour due to Him; and the whole earth will be in His grip on the day of Resurrection and the *samâwât* rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! And highly exalted is He above what they associate (with Him).

**68** And the trumpet is blown, so all those in the *samâwât* and all those in the earth will swoon, except such as Allâh please. Then it will be blown again, when lo! They stand up, awaiting.<sup>a</sup>

**69** And the earth beams with the light of its *Rabb*, and the Book is laid down, and the prophets and the witnesses are brought up, and judgment is given between them with justice, and they are not wronged.<sup>a</sup>

**70** And every *nafs* is paid back fully for what it did, and He knows best what they do.

## SECTION 8: Each Party meets with its Desert

**71** And those who disbelieve are driven to hell in companies; until, when they come to it, its doors are opened, and the keepers of it say to them: Did not there come to you messengers from among you reciting to you the messages of your *Rabb* and warning you of the meeting of this day of yours? They say: Yea. But the word of punishment proved true against the disbelievers.

**68a.** For the *Ŝûr*, see 6:73b. Here it is stated that the trumpet is blown twice. At the first blowing all swoons, and at the second blowing they all stand up, awaiting to receive the judgment. A general destruction is thus followed by a resurrection. In the case of the religious resurrection, the destruction signifies the destruction of the old order.

**69a.** The beaming of the earth with the light of its *Rabb* in the Resurrection is in reference to the clear manifestation of the consequences of the deeds which remain generally hidden in this life. The laying down of the Book refers to the passing of the judgment on the good and the evil according to their deserts. The prophets and the witnesses are brought up, these being the people who sow the seeds of virtue and turn human being's minds to Allâh. Prophets were sent to every nation, and the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad, who take the place of the previous prophets in turning human being's minds to Allâh, are the witnesses spoken of here; they are specially mentioned by this name in 2:143. A deeper reference to the religious resurrection is evident throughout.

**72** It is said: Enter the gates of hell to abide therein; so evil is the abode of the proud.

**73** And those who keep their duty to their *Rabb* are conveyed to the Garden in companies until when they come to it, and its doors are opened and the keepers of it say to them: Peace be to you! you led pure lives; so enter it to abide.

**74** And they say: Praise be to Allâh! Who has made good to us His promise, and He has made us inherit the land; we abide in the Garden where we please.<sup>a</sup> So goodly is the reward of the workers.

**75** And you see the malâ'ikah going round about the Throne of Power, glorifying their *Rabb* with praise. And they are judged with justice, and it is said: Praise be to Allâh, the *Rabb* of the worlds!

**74a.** Never was prophecy uttered in clearer terms, nor in more adverse circumstances. The day must come, we are here told, when the believers will praise Allâh for making them inherit the land. Within fifteen years of this prophecy they were made masters of Arabia, and within another five they were made to inherit the Holy Land. Note, further, how the prophecies of triumph in this life are combined with the Resurrection in which the righteous are to receive the mighty religious blessings in full manifestation.